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ABSTRACT

Recent research has shown that Brazilian Portuguese is undergoing a change regarding the null subject parameter, evolving from a null subject to a non-null subject language. This paper presents the results of a short term, real time study of speakers of Brazilian Portuguese with low and mid levels of formal education. The study was based on samples of speakers recorded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the early 1980s and between 1999 and 2000. The study examined changes in the process, analyzing the linguistic behavior of the same individuals and people from the same community after a certain time interval. Results confirmed the grammatical change toward expressed pronominal subjects in Brazilian Portuguese and suggest that the process was stable over the 19 years, not only for the individual but also for the community. (SM)

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A SHORT TERM REAL TIME STUDY IN SYNTACTIC CHANGE

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1. Introduction

Recent synchronic and diachronic researches (Duarte 1993, 1995, 2000 among others) have shown that Brazilian Portuguese is undergoing a change regarding the Null Subject Parameter, evolving from a null subject to a non-null subject language. Figure 1 shows the progress of the change towards expressed referential subjects (1st, 2nd and 3rd persons) during the past two centuries:

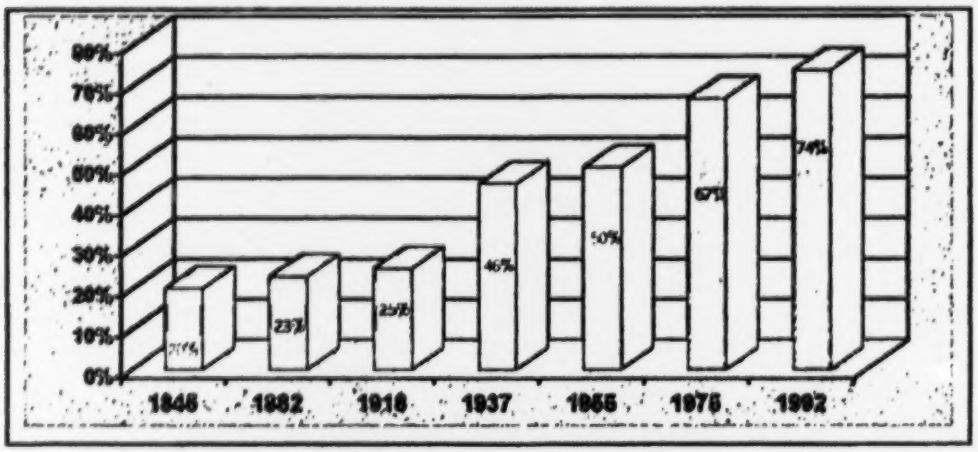

Fig. 1. Expressed pronominal subjects in popular plays during seven periods (Duarte1993,2000)

As the figure shows, subjects were preferably null during the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century. During that period, BP exhibited what one can call a rich inflectional paradigm with a distinctive morphology for each grammatical person. During the next two periods examined, the inflectional paradigm was reduced: 2nd person pronouns (*tu* and *vós*) were replaced by an address form (*você(s)*), which combines with 3rd person verbal forms and, as a consequence, the rates of expressed subjects start to increase.

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Finally, in the last two periods, the paradigm becomes even poorer with the replacement, specially among young people, of 1st person plural (*nós*) by the expression "*a gente*" ("the folks", meaning I and you, I and he, she, etc), which also combines with 3rd person singular verb form, and the expression of the pronominal subjects outdoes null subjects.

Today, there is not a single context in which a referential subject is obligatorily null in Brazilian Portuguese. And, contrary to what happens in a null subject language, such as Italian, Spanish and European Portuguese, the unmarked option (i.e. last frequent) in BP today is the expressed subject, as examples (1), (2) and (3) show for each grammatical person:

(1) **Eu** nasci aqui em Inhaúma e aqui nessa casa **eu** moro tem trinta e um anos. Trinta e um anos que **eu** moro aqui. **Eu** morei numa outra casa. Depois **eu** comprei esse terreno aqui...
'I was born in Inhaúma e here in this house I live for thirty one years. Thirty one years that I live here. I lived in another house. Then I bought this lot here... '

(2) **Vocês** são muito jovens. **Vocês** acham que **vocês** podem mudar o mundo.
'you are very young. You think that you can change the world'

(3) **Meu marido** conhece o Brasil quase todo, porque **ele** trabalhava no Instituto Nacional de Migração. Então **ele** viajava muito. Aí, depois que **ele** se aposentou, ___ nunca mais viajou. Tanto que **ele** ainda não foi lá na casa do meu filho. **Ele** ainda não foi lá. **Ele** conhece, que **ele** já esteve lá quando **ele** trabalhava. **Ele** conhece as Sete Quedas, **ele** conhece Foz, ___ conhece tudo, mas **ele** nunca foi na casa do meu filho. Acho que **ele** viajou tanto que agora ___ não liga.
'my husband knows almost everywhere in Brazil, because he worked for the National Institute of Migration. So he used to travel a lot. Then, after he retired, ___ never traveled again. So he hasn't been to my son's house yet. He hasn't been there. He knows (the place) because he went there while he worked. He knows Sete Quedas, he knows Foz, ___ knows everything, but he's never been to my son's. I think that he traveled so much that ___ doesn't care any more'

The purpose of this paper is to show the results of a short term real time study ("panel" and "trend" studies) based on samples recorded in Rio de Janeiro in the beginning of the 80's and during the years of 1999 and 2000, with an intervening period of 16-19 years, with speakers of low and middle level of formal education. The two types of study intend to examine change in progress, analyzing, in the first case, the linguistic behavior of the same individual after an interval of time and, in the second, two samples of the same community obtained following the same criteria (see Labov 1994). The panel study is based on the speech of 16 individuals and the trend study considers two samples with 30 different speakers each, stratified according to age, gender and level of schooling.

2. The analysis

2.1. The external factors

The analysis excludes second coordinated structures with coreferential subjects since the occurrence of a null subject in such an environment is not an exclusive property of a null subject language. The overall distribution of expressed subjects can be seen in Table 1, where samples are distinguished according to the period of recording ((I) stands for individual and (C) for community):

Table 1. *Expressed subjects in the samples analyzed*

Panel Study		Trend Study	
Sample 1980 (I)	Sample 2000 (I)	Sample 1980 (C)	Sample 2000 (C)
1696/2168	1646/2056	3640/4540	3421/4264
78%	80%	80%	80%
Input .79	*Input* .81	*Input* .81	*Input* .81

The general results confirm the unmarked character of the expressed subjects in BP and suggest that the phenomenon has remained stable during the past 19 years.

The individual behavior is shown in table 2. Since relative weights (RW) for both periods should be taken from the same run in order to be comparable and the computational program (VARBRUL) does not take more that 30 factors in each factor group, the individuals were separated into two groups: those whose level of schooling has changed (the first six in the table) and those who have maintained the level of education.

Table 2. *Expressed subjects in a panel study*

Samples	1980 (I) (*input*.82)			2000 (I) (*input*.83)		
Speaker	Age	%	R.W.	Age	%	R.W.
Eri59	9	74	.40	25	79	.43
Adr57	10	83	.51	26	84	.50
Adr63	12	76	.40	28	79	.43
Fat23	15	90	.66	33	91	.69
San39	15	83	.50	33	83	.51
Leo38	18	78	.43	36	85	.51
Jup06	18	84	.62	35	88	.68
Lei04	25	83	.53	43	80	.50
Dav42	31	89	.70	48	92	.75
Jvas26	32	85	.65	48	84	.65
Eve43	42	82	.56	59	76	.46
Mgl48	52	87	.65	70	92	.78
Jan03	56	69	.38	74	65	.32
Nad36	57	56	.26	74	76	.46
Jos35	59	79	.53	75	70	.34
Ago33	60	64	.27	77	61	.25

If we take into account the fact that a maximum difference of .10 between the relative weights obtained in each period is not significant, it is surprising to observe the regularity of behavior of 14 individuals. Among them, only two, Jan03 and Ago33, at the age of 74 and 77 at the time of the second interview, clearly favor null subjects. Nad36 and Jos35 are the only speakers that show instability in their behavior, the first increasing the expression of subjects and the second increasing the choice of null subjects. In any case one can say that the lowest relative weights are restricted to the older speakers.

The trend study points out the same stability found in the panel study. Among the social factors considered, the gender was rejected and the age group and level of schooling, selected. The two following tables show the results for both variables:

Table 3.*Expressed subjects and age group – Trend study*

Samples	1980 (C)		2000 (C)	
Age group	%	R.W.	%	R.W.
07-14	79	.51	75	.44
15-25	84	.57	81	.51
26-49	82	.49	84	.55
50...	74	.42	78	.47

Table 4. *Expressed subjects and school level – Trend study*

Samples	1980 (C)		2000 (C)	
School level	%	R.W.	%	R.W.
4 years	81	.50	81	.50
8 years	78	.46	77	.46
11 years	84	.62	85	.59

The relative weights for age are very close, showing a slight favoring of null subjects by the older speakers. Regarding the school level, the rule is favored by those with a higher level of education, which can be attributed either to more spontaneity or to higher structural complexity in their speech, which, as will be shown in the next section, plays an important role in the expression of the pronominal subjects.

2.2.The internal factors

Regarding the structural factors, the two types of study show the importance of the presence of elements before the subject for its expression. Here we present only the results for the trend study but the ones obtained for the panel study are comparable. The structure of CP (Complementizer Phrase), for instance, plays an important role in the expression/non-expression of subjects. The presence of elements in Spec of CP (such as relative and interrogative pronouns) or in the head of CP - C_0 (subordinate conjunctions), illustrated in (4a,b), below favors full subjects, while the absence of elements, as in (4c), disfavors them:

(4) a. Foi uma reportagem que **eu** vi na televisão na época que **eu** via televisão.
'it was a program that I saw on tv in the time when I watched tv'

b. **Ela** ganha bem, mas eu acho que **ela** devia ganhar mais porque **ela** merece.
'she makes good money but I think that she should make more because she deserves'

c. **Eu** estava grávida da Cocódi, barrigão, sete, oito, nove meses. ___ Pegava esses ônibus, Caxias, em pé. ___ Ia a Madureira... ___ Tenho dois braços. **Eu** carregava seis sacolas.
'I was pregnant of Cocódi, big belly, seven, eight months. Took those buses, Caxias, standing. Went to Madureira... Have two arms. I used to carry six bags'

Table 5 shows the percentages and relative weights:

Table 5. *Expressed subjects and the structure of CP*

Sample	1980 (C)		2000 (C)	
Structure of CP	%	R.W.	%	R.W.
Element in Spec of CP	92	**.86**	96	**.91**
Element in C_0	84	**.63**	87	**.75**
Empty CP	79	.44	77	.38

Notice the impressive relative weights for the presence of elements in Spec of CP, and, in spite of the rates, the opposed effect for an empty CP.

In the same way, the presence of elements in adjunction to IP (Inflectional Phrase) seems to collaborate for filled subjects. Such elements can be topicalized items or adverbial adjuncts (5a,b). No elements in such a position (5c) again disfavor the expression of the subject. See the examples and the table below:

(5) a.Minha avó gosta muito de se divertir, gosta de tomar a cerveja dela. Cerveja **ela** toma bastante.

'my grandmother likes to enjoy herself, likes to drink her beer. Beer she drinks a lot'

b.Agora **ele** deixou de ter amigo. Agora **ele** só tem um colega.

'now he doesn't have friends, now he only has classmates'

c.Aí **ele** foi pra França. ___ Botou o bicho pra voar. ___ Fez lá o balão

'then he went to France. Made the thing fly. Made the balloon.'

Table 6. *Expressed subjects and presence/absence of adjuncts to IP*

Sample	1980 (C)		2000 (C)	
Presence/absence of adjuncts to IP	%	P.R.	%	P.R.
Topicalizations	91	**.74**	87	**.64**
Adverbial adjuncts	90	**.69**	80	**.55**
No elements	79	.48	80	.49

Even less strongly than the structure of CP, one has a similar pattern regarding the presence/absence of elements in adjunction to IP.

The results shown above suggest that in such a scenery of change a null subject occurrence relies in the easy access to a referent. The more elements between the antecedent and the subject the most unlikely the occurrence of a null subject. The non-selection of the type of inflection (distinctive-non-distinctive for person and number) or even the grammatical person (1^{st}, 2^{nd}, 3^{rd}) seems to confirm that and to corroborate the hypothesis that BP has lost the inflectional richness (see Roberts 1993a) which characterizes the romance null subject languages. Null subjects in BP today seem restricted to contexts with the same discourse topic and with no elements before the subject which might hinder the identification of an empty category.

The samples analyzed also show stability concerning the evidences of the embedding of the change in the system (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968). On the one hand, the speakers prefer full pronominal forms to express arbitrary subjects rather than null pronouns. The first option is the pronoun "*você*" (you) followed by "*a gente*" (one). Another evidence of the embedding of the change is the consistency in the presence of left-dislocated subjects (about 5% of the expressed subjects), a structure which is absent in genuine null subject languages, but very frequent in French, a non-null subject system. Left-dislocated subjects appear syntactically adjacent to the NP, with or without a pause, as in (6)-(7):

(6) **O nosso chefe ele** era muito legal.
'our boss he was nice'

(7) **O Alexandre, ele** gosta daqui.
'Alexander, he likes it here'

with intervening elements, as in (8)-(10):

(8) **Eu** [jamais] **eu** volto ali.
'I never I come back there'

(9) **O meu mais velho,** [que é engenheiro,] **ele** não gosta de estudar.
'my older son, who is an engineer, he doesn't like to study'

(10) **Eu,** [quando eu retornei a Jacarepaguá,] **eu** vim assim numa situação bem difícil.
'I, when I came back to Jacarepaguá, I came in a very difficult moment'

in roots or embedded clauses, as in (11):

(11) Não é como o Rio de Janeiro, [que **você** em cada esquina **você** tem um bar pra você lanchar].
'it's not like Rio de Janeiro, where you in every corner you have a bar to have a snack.

To conclude, the two analyses confirm the grammatical change towards expressed pronominal subjects in Brazilian Portuguese and suggest that the process has been stable for the past 19 years, not only regarding the individual but the community as well. Using the past to understand the present, it should be useful to take into account the fact that Medieval French, during the process of change from pro-drop to non pro-drop language, exhibited a defective system of null subjects for over 150 years (Roberts 1993a,b, Vance 1989). The study also contributes to show that a parametric change, as any change, involves variation, and that the association of generative and variationist assumptions can be enlightening in the study of syntactic change (Duarte 1999).

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